

100-Drabble Challenge

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Summary: My attempt at the 100-DrabbleChallenge, introduced to me by UnnamedElement, created by NirCele, and given to me by LadyLindariel. Thanks to all of you!

1. Fire

Gandalf stared into the flickering flames, his mind apparently elsewhere. His ears, however, were trained upon the stiff silence of the man beside him.

As Gandalf heard the light footsteps approach the man, he leaned back against the tree, closing his eyes and attuning himself to their movements, their whispers, their emotions.

Sits down, light-hearted, beside the man.

Looks up.

"What troubles you, mellon nÃ-n?" A whisper, a hand on his arm.

Shoulders relax, silent sigh, weary, turmoil, doubt, fear. "I will be well in time."

Disbelieving glance.

Meets his gaze, sighs audibly. "I fear for the future."

Settles beside him. "What future?"

"The future of Arda, the future of the two kingdoms, the future of my family and myself. And the future I cannot change." Looks at him. Distraught. Ruined. Torn.

_Silence. Shifts slightly. "All futures are fearful. That is the nature of the unknown. There is no reassurance to give, as there is no assurance. That is why the Valar, in their goodness, bring to the

world those such as yourself. Every age needs Hope."_

Looks to him. "And when Hope itself needs reassurance, he is given it." Smiles to him, relaxing further.

Laughs. "Let Hope give all of himself to others and keep none for himself. It shall be returned in time. Now sleep, Estel. It is far too late for this jibberish."

Laughs, banters, but lies down.

Lies beside him, humming a song to the stars.

Falls asleep to the voice.

Finishes song, falls into Elven Dream.

Gandalf smiles to himself. The Hope of Mankind, finding strength in the roots of those before him. There would be Hope for the race of Men.

2. Pet

Legolas bent down, looking for the little creature.

He was alone for the day, not planning to see Aragorn until that evening. It was just after noon now, and he had a few hours to do with whatever he wished. He had assumed he would practice with his bow, when this little shadow changed his plans.

"Come on, come out. Let me see you."

It was too playful, he realized. The creature wanted a game. Legolas would have to play along, for now, until the kitten was satisfied.

He dove under his vanity, desperately reaching for the fluffy animal, a wide grin on his face. The cat dashed away from his hands, and the elf quickly pursued.

He had not seen the cat when he opened the door to his chamber, but the cat had seen an opportunity. Now it seemed the kitten was here to stay.

It was some time and much chasing later that Legolas found himself lying on the floor, laughing musically, the kitten's paw on his chest in triumph.

"You win, mellon nÃ-n." Legolas then lifted the cat into his arms and sat on the edge of his miraculously made bed before swinging his boots on top of the comforter and lying back, entirely ignoring the mud and forest spreading easily onto the white material.

Legolas smiled at the cat, holding her high in the air. Then he set the kitten on his chest, expecting him to dash away. Instead, the kitten curled into a ball and closed his eyes, quickly falling asleep. This made Legolas smile all the brighter.

Aragorn knocked on Legolas' door a third time. He had been concerned

when the elf had not appeared at dinner, but for him not to answer his door was truly concerning. He had asked all the servants, searched the palace. The elf couldn't be anywhere else. Suddenly worried the elf might be poisoned or injured, he turned the knob and entered.

The sight before him brought a grin to his lips. Legolas was deeply asleep, his eyes glazed in Elven Dream, his hands resting on the back of a small, gray kitten. Every few moments Legolas' fingers would curl, petting the creature delicately.

Aragorn had not seen Legolas so at peace since before the War of the Ring. The Battle of Pelennor Fields had occurred only a few months prior, and though Legolas tried desperately to hide it, Aragorn knew the elf was suffering.

For this moment, however, the elf was blissfully asleep, content to hold the kitten and let the world pass him by.

The sky was dark when Legolas finally awoke, only to find the King and Heir of Isildur on the floor beside his bed, now also well asleep, with the kitten playing quietly in the dark, swatting Aragorn's curls back and forth in the night.

He could not help but smile.

3. Transportation

"They would be massive, large enough to hold anyone and everyone within themselves. They would have plush seats, with large wheels constantly turning at immense speed to propel it forward. And it would regulate temperature! Cool in the warm months, cold in the winter!" "Oh, there would be glass windows, so you could see all the trees as well, elf!" and they would move faster than a horse! Why, with one of these the whole Fellowship could reach Mordor in less than a week, with no discomfort! Now, that would be an invention worthy of Dwarvish fires!"

Legolas turned to Gimli, staring incredulously. "If you are truly that exhausted, Master Dwarf, we can stop to rest."

At this Gimli turned beet red. "A dwarf? Exhausted? We dwarves are natural sprinters. Were the distance a bit less, I could easily outrun any elf!"

Aragorn sighed. This was going to be a very long trip.

4. Plants

"Come on, Ada! Outside!"

Elrond followed behind his human son, somewhat grudgingly. "Estel, I have told you, I'm very busy. I cannot play with you right now. Why don't you go find your brothers?"

At this Estel turned around, his eyes wide, shining with tears. "You don't have enough time for me, Ada?"

Elrond's heart broke. "Oh Estel, no, that's not what I meant." He knelt down, and immediately the five-year-old was in his arms. "All right. Just for a few minutes, understand?"

Estel was beaming again. "Come _on,_ Ada! Before it rains again!"

Indeed, the horizon was dark when Elrond stepped upon the grass, carrying Estel close to his chest. Above them, however, was the clearest blue Elrond had seen in...

He couldn't remember the last time he had been outside. Everything had been so rushed lately. It had to have been over a week, maybe two...

Suddenly, the Half-elven's heart felt lighter. He breathed deeply, taking in the scent of the pollen and the oncoming rain, feeling the chill in the air before the war of nature resumed.

"Ada! Put me down!... Please?"

Estel's little voice pulled him back to reality. He opened his eyesâ€"Had he shut them?â€"and set Estel on the ground. Moments later Estel was dashing away, but Elrond did not call him back. He knew all his son's hiding places. In thirty seconds he would find him again.

Inside the walls of Imaldris, Elrond's two older sons smiled in triumph.

"I told you, Elladan. If anyone could get Ada outside, it was Estel."

"The crying was a nice touch."

"We've taught him well. After all these years, there'll be another scheming Elrondion!"

5. Threats

"I wish you would leave Arda! Then I could live an eternity without having to deal with you!"

A teenage Elros looked at his twin, the anger quickly fading from his face. "You don't mean that."

Elrond's expression was severe. "I do. I cannot change the unfortunate event of my being born a twin, but I will not hide under your shadow for the rest of my immortal life! I will choose immortality, and if I am lucky you will choose otherwise. Then I'll never have to deal with you again!"

Surprisingly, Elros' expression relaxed. "But you don't want me to leave now."

Elrond glared, about to retaliate, when he paused and shook his head. "No." He turned away from Elros, anger still evident in his stance.

Elros approached his brother. "Muindor, this argument is petty. Don't disagree; you know it is."

Elrond sighed, noting Elros' serious tone. "You are right, muindor. Goheno nin. I have been foolish."

Elros smiled briefly at his brother, far more tempered than he. "All is forgiven." Then his expression became serious. "Will you truly choose immortality?"

Elrond nodded. "Of course. I would escape the pain of dying."

Elros shook his head. "In this you are wrong, dear brother. Mortals die but once. The immortal die with every age one thousand times over."

Elrond hesitated, his eyes widening with understanding. "And you, Elros? What will you choose?"

The brother hesitated only a moment. "I believe I shall fulfill your wish, muindor."

"No! Elros, no, I did not mean my words!" Elrond was pleading now.

Elros silenced him. "I know, brother, I understand. You would never say such harmful words except in anger." Elros continued, ignoring his brother's look of shame. "I have been considering this for some time, Elrond. Life is a precious gift. To have it forever would lessen the blessing."

Elrond's eyes shown with tears, which finally spilled past his lashes. "You would die... You would suffer that pain. Why go through such torment when one might let it pass?"

Elros placed a hand on his brother's shoulder, offering a small, loving smile. "Someday, muindor nÃ-n, you will understand my decision."

Elrond met his brother's gaze, his own suddenly filled with anger. "If you leave me, I will never forgive you for it."

"You will."

So many lifetimes later, after losing his brother, his wife, his daughter, his adoptive son, his home... After dying so many deaths, Elrond finally understood his brother's wise decision. There was a reason mortality was considered the Gift of Men. As he waited for the ship to reach Valinor, he once again found himself unable to keep to his threat. He loved his brother too dearly to hate him.

He would be reunited with his wife. Then he would wait for the end of the world, to find his family once again, beyond the bonds of Arda.

6. Water

Water.

It was everywhere, surrounding him, holding him, gripping him, paralyzingly him, trying to enter his nose, his lungs...

He shot toward the surface, only to find he had shifted under the water. Instead of the gray, frozen sky, he was met by solid ice. Try as he might, he could not find the crack through which he had fallen.

Spots danced before his eyes as he realized he might die here. What would his friends suppose happened to him? What would his father think? He hadn't been home in so long. Would his father even know? Would he realize...

Would anyone find his body? Or would he be trapped here forever, under the water, never given chance to touch the air again, even after his inevitable passing?

He no longer knew which direction was up. Disoriented, dying, he lashed through the stiffening liquid, as if to ward away its cords, to keep it from holding him bound. But with every thrashing turn, his body further shut down.

He was fading... He was dying... His mind slowly, weakly turned again to his family. His brothers, who had taught him to use a sword. His father, who took him in when he had no one left. His closest friend, who had strengthened his spirit and molded him into the man he was today. Then his mind fell upon his love, his star, his everything...

It was with her silhouette gracing his mind's eye that he finally released his hold on consciousness. The last thing he felt was water finally pouring into his lungs.

He did not feel the arms that broke the surface of the ice, wrapped around his waist, and pulled him away from the abyss.

Lord Elrond had felt a disturbance in the night. He knew something was wrong, very wrong, just within the borders of Imaldris. Knowing not what he would find, he quickly dressed and left a note on his desk for Erester to find, should he not return before dawn. Then the Lord of Imaldris went to the stables.

Now, almost 36 hours after the discovery of his foster son alone under the water, the Half-elven lord still sat at his side. Aragorn was heavily bandaged and placed under as many blankets as Elrond could possibly find. A fire continued to blaze in the now uncomfortably warm room. Elrond's eyes were red and bloodshot when Aragorn finally stirred.

Elrond pressed a hand to his son's cheek. "Estel. Aragorn. It is time to wake. Open your eyes, ion nÃ-n. Estel!"

In Aragorn's foggy mind, little of these words made sense.

"Estel." Hope? Why simply state hope? Why would this person be calling for hope now?

"Aragorn." Aragorn... Something itched in the back of his mind, trying to come to the surface, but when he tried to grasp it the knowledge faded again.

"It is time to wake. Open your eyes, ion nÃ-n." My son. He had heard these words before. This language, this voice, even this conversation he was overhearing... It was all familiar.

"Estel!" That voice was his father! And his father was calling to him! He was Estel, this was his father, and he had to open his eyes. He had to open his eyes now...

Elrond released a heavy sigh when Aragorn's eyes fluttered, then opened slowly. The gray eyes locked onto his own immediately, a surprising but very positive sign.

"Ada..."

Then his healer's mask deteriorated, and he became the father. Aragorn was in his arms almost before his son had finished the word. "Estel. Thank the Valar you are safe!"

There would be many explanations, both knew. With the growing darkness, Aragorn would certainly have news to give, and Elrond had prepared a long lecture on the dangers of walking over thin ice. But for this one moment, everything was right within the walls of the Last Homely House. Despite the dark and swirling doom solidifying in the cold, the heart of Imaldris continued to beat.

7. Wind

Legolas had a wrong to right.

But he could not do it yet.

Instead, he wandered through the forest, going in the direction he knew better than any other, save toward Mirkwood and Gondor.

He walked toward the ruins of Rivendell.

Over one hundred years after Lord Elrond sailed to Valinor, the old safe haven was abandoned entirely, left to the care of the animals and plants of the ever-encroaching forest.

He did not sing or hum as he walked; he moved on in silence, letting his reeling mind rule over his senses.

It was for this reason he did not realize the man's presence.

They stood in a small clearing, face to face, both looking intently at the other. On Legolas' face was evident confusion. Why would this mortal, old and gray, be here, in this empty forest? The man's face, however, was filled with surprise, for he knew the identity of this elf and could not fathom why he would be here.

It was Legolas who first spoke. "What brings you here, Secondborn?"

"I could ask you the same, Legolas, son of Thranduil."

He froze. "You know my name."

The man had long hair, entirely white, with a beard only second to Mithrandir's own. He seemed to stand and pace carefully, yet purposefully. Every move was lithe, especially considering his apparent age. Slowly, a look of hope had been creeping into his eyes, until this sentence of Legolas' had abashed it. "You do not know me."

Legolas could see some hurt in his eyes, but was none the wiser. He was certain he had never seen this old man before. Surely this commonerâ€”commoner was apparent by his clothingâ€”was mistaken?

As he voiced this possibility, the man smiled brightly. "Certainly it is. I hail from Gondor, and have often heard your name spoken. Certainly I imagined meeting you, a dream perhaps, and my guessing your name was lucky. My mind is not quite what it used to be."

Legolas suppressed a groan. Of course, this man would be of Gondor. "And so, I ask again, what brings a mortal this far toward Rivendell?" He had seen the light return to the man's eyes, and though he thought him suspicious, he felt no threat from him.

This time, the man answered his question. "The King grew up here, did he not? I wished to see the place where he was raised, before my body would no longer allow it. Like my mind, my body is not quite what it used to be." His eyes glowed withâ€”"Was that mirth?"â€”as he stated this last sentence.

Legolas watched him move, with comparable ease. "Your mind must be greater than you let on, if it is in even tow with your body."

"Thank you, good elf. And what should bring you here?"

Legolas paused a few minutes before responding. "You have heard my name before."

"Yes."

"In connection with the king."

"Yes."

"Yet you have never seen me."

"I live within Minas Tirith. It would seem you have not entered the White City for some great amount of time."

Legolas took a breath and continued. "It has been one hundred years to the day."

The man nodded, then widened his eyes. "I have often heard of the age of the king, but never could I imagine..."

"When I last saw him, it was his 100th birthday, and he looked no older than forty, as compared to any mortal."

"Thirty-five."

Legolas turned. "What?"

"I had always heard thirty-five." The man smiled sheepishly.

Legolas sighed. "Thirty-five then. Today is his 200th birthday, so I assume he looks no older than eighty... or seventy," he added, noting the look on the man's face.

"Why have you never returned to Minas Tirith?"

Legolas looked at the man sharply, but his gaze was met by one of innocent curiosity. Though, he could have sworn he saw something in the eyes...

"I do not believe that to be of your concern."

The man's face fell. "There was an argument, wasn't there?" he prompted.

Legolas turned sharply. "How could you know?"

He shrugged. "All friends fight."

Legolas sighed, his shoulders sagging. "Let this not lessen your love for the king. The argument was entirely my own fault."

"Then why did you never return?"

Legolas looked to him. "I feared his majesty's anger."

The man blinked. This was not what he had expected. "Surely you know that King Elessar cannot very well hold anger."

"And yet, when he does it is frightening."

The man shook his head. "He would have wanted you to return."

Legolas blinked. "How can you know?"

"Because I am human."

After they had traveled together some distance, the pair reached the river. The man remained on the ground while Legolas climbed a tree, looking for a place where his aging friend could cross with ease.

Just as Legolas was jumping from one tree to the next, a gust of wind blew fiercely across the landscape, moving the elf off course just enough that he landed with a splash in the river.

The man watched in horror as Legolas fell, but when the elf resurfaced, it was to the sound of hearty laughter. He scowled through wet hair at the man, not realizing just how familiar the laughter was. As he attempted to stand, his left leg gave way, and he fell back into the water.

Before he knew it, Legolas had been retrieved and situated on the bank.

The man then pulled at a pouch on his hip. "You have a deep cut across your leg, most likely from a rock. I am a healer, let me help you."

Legolas was surprised to find himself nodding consent.

The man used a bandage to towel the limb dry, then pulled out two green leaves.

"Athelas. Has this plant come to common use in Gondor?"

"No," the man replied. "It is used only by and for the royal family of Gondor." With this, he lifted the plant to his lips, speaking low under his breath. The scent of the plant intensified.

Only now did Legolas' eyes open wide with recognition. "Estel!"

A smile came to the lips of the king. "I was beginning to think you might never recognize me. Have I changed that greatly, Legolas, or is the elven mind so dulled?"

"Aragorn, forgive me, I ruined so much with my words, only to leave the kingdom andâ€" "

Aragorn silenced him with a look. "Do not seek further forgiveness, mellon nÃ-n. I can give no more, as I have forgiven you entirely. Hearing your story, told to a supposed stranger, has told me more than you could ever say again. I have only a few short years of life left. Can we not spend them together, as friends?"

There was a long pause before Legolas finally said, "Ninety."

Aragorn looked up from the injury. "What did you say?"

"Ninety. I was mistaken. You look to be at least ninety."

Legolas earned himself a swat on the head, and both were soon laughing loudly, as if the separation of one hundred years had never occurred.

"Happy birthday, Estel."

8. Hobby

Thranduil threw open the door to Elrond's room roughly. Immediately a frown creased his features.

Elrond was still sitting with that book.

Thranduil crossed to him, pushing both elf and chair away from the desk at an angle. "And why are you still here?"

Elrond looked up, surprised. "Good morning, mellon nÃ-n. And how are you?"

Thranduil rolled his eyes. "Enough of the pleasantries. And the morning is almost past. Yet I doubt you have moved from this seat since I found you here yesterday!"

Elrond stood slowly, stretching his sore limbs. "On the contrary, I took a walk just before dawn. You, however... You've only just awoken. Too much alcohol last night?" He raised an eyebrow, a knowing look in his gaze. Thranduil scowled mildly, and Elrond responded with a chuckle and a smile. "Your eyes give you away."

"Yours are looking especially strained this morning. Did you sleep at all?"

"What would be the point in that? So much time wasted."

"And you call yourself a healer!"

"I was preoccupied."

"By nothing of importance!"

"Patience, Thranduil. It is too early in the day for such shouting." Elrond held out a hand, attempting to pacify his friend.

Instead, Thranduil threw his hands to his sides. "Yesterday, it was the herbs. The day before, a 'dispatch.' The elves from Lothlórien are coming to Imaldris today, and may the Valar smite you if you continue to read through their arrival!"

Elrond sighed, placing a marker in the book and closing it. "They will not come for some hours yet."

It was clear Thranduil was winning. "And if they were to arrive within an hour or two, would you be prepared?"

"Imaldris would be prepared."

"And you?"

Elrond fell silent. After a moment, he spoke. "Very well, Thranduil. I will bathe... and eat," he added, seeing the glare in Thranduil's eye.

Finally the Crown Prince of Greenwood the Great smiled. "You know, Galadriel and Celeborn are bringing their daughter this time. Celebrían."

Elrond frowned. "And what are you trying to say, Thranduil, miserable elf?!"

He cackled. "Only that you should keep all options in mind."

"Thranduil! I am perfectly fine, happy even, quite capable of taking care of myself!"

"But do you?" Thranduil raised an eyebrow. "Do not rule it out, mellon nán." With that, he exited the room, leaving Elrond more dumbfounded than he had been in an era.

Some hours later, Elrond was even more surprised to realize his irritating friend had been correct.

9. Tradition

Legolas was surprised to see Estel, the six-year-old mortal, curled on his bed, fast asleep, hiccuping slightly, with the salty remains of tears streaked across his cheeks.

He had arrived in Imaldris only a few days prior, late in the night. Estel had been allowed to stay awake, to greet his Elven friend.

The boy bounced on the balls of his feet, waiting for Legolas' arrival, fidgeting in the hall outside the blonde elf's door.

When the prince finally arrived, Estel squealed and held up his arms to be lifted. "Leg'lass! Suilad, Leg'lass!"

Estel didn't understand the friend's silence, his low-hanging head, the shoulder he held carefully.

"Leg'lass?" Estel did know, however, that something was wrong.

Legolas finally heard the little cry and looked down. "Estel." It was said on a sigh, and he shook his head. "I'm sorry, tithen pen. I can't lift you now."

Estel dropped his arms and stopped the elf with his voice, keeping him from entering his room, though he had just opened the door with his uninjured arm. "Leg'lass... Can you still tell me a story?" He shuffled uncomfortably. "You always tell me a story of your journey here. It's like a tra... a tra-dit-shun."

"Tradition," Legolas pronounced, much more fluidly. "Not tonight, Estel. Not tonight." Legolas could hardly think back to his arrival in Imaldris. The pain of it was still too near.

Estel's gaze dropped. "Oh. Okay." He quickly hurried off toward his room.

The next morning when Estel went to breakfast, his whole family was present, but the prince's chair remained empty.

He turned to Lord Elrond. "Ada, where is Leg'lass?"

"He is still asleep, ion nÃ-n. And you are to let him rest as long as he needs. He's had a long and difficult journey. Understand?"

Estel nodded. "What happened, Ada?"

The Elf Lord sighed. "There were orcs on the path that night. His shoulder is wounded, and his spirits even more so."

Estel's eyes widened, but he nodded and said nothing more.

He waited until the afternoon to approach Legolas' door.

Some minutes he stood outside, staring at the door, before quietly knocking.

No answer.

"Leg'lass?" After several unanswered knocks, Estel carefully eased open the door and stepped inside.

Legolas was lying on his bed, facing away from the boy. When Estel crept around the bed, he was surprised to find the elf's eyes shining with tears.

"Leg'lass? Why are you crying?"

The elf jumped and whirled his head toward Estel. Suddenly the prince's eyes were like fire. "What are you doing here? Get out!"

Estel stepped away, shock written across his face. "I... I'm sorry, Leg'lass, goheno nin, I..."

"GET OUT!" Legolas sat quickly, throwing the blankets from the bed.

Estel ran.

He did not see the regret wash over Legolas' face as he fell back to the bed.

That night, after Estel had told them what had happened, the twins finally returned from Legolas' room to say good night to Estel.

"Will Leg'lass be okay?"

"Yes, Estel. He is feeling a bit better now, and his shoulder is almost completely healed," Elladan assured him.

"Is he... angry with me?" Estel sniffed, almost crying again, for the fifth time since his flight from Legolas.

"Oh, no, Estel." Elrohir picked him up, hugging him close to his chest. "He feels very bad for scaring you. He wants you to know he's sorry."

The boy nodded. "It's... okay." He yawned broadly, and soon he was tucked into bed and fast asleep.

The next morning, he couldn't find anyone.

The twins were gone. Legolas was gone. It seemed that everyone was gone.

Finally Estel bumped into his adar. "Ada, Ada! Where's El'dan and 'Ro? Where's Leg'lass?"

Elrond sighed, bending down to lift his adoptive son. "Your brothers thought Legolas might feel better if he were to go on a hunt. They left very early this morning, before dawn."

Estel's eyes widened. "But... They said he was feeling better..."

Elrond nodded. "He is, and we believe this will help him heal

completely. He will be back before you wake tomorrow, tithen pen." With that, Elrond set Estel down again and went into his study.

They had left without him, without even saying goodbye! All day Estel tried to focus on other things, but thoughts of his family, his mentors, his friendsâ€”his brothers, all three of themâ€”continued to flood his mind.

After he was supposed to be asleep, Estel crept down the hall to Legolas' room, trailing a blanket behind him. He lay on the soft comforter, which smelled like bark and dried leaves, like Legolas. Before he knew it, he was fast asleep, the ghosts of his tears still evident on his face.

Legolas carefully approached the child, still hiccuping in his dreams from his former sobs. Legolas felt empty, watching the child cry even in his sleep. He quickly discarded his weapons and filthy outer clothes, then climbed into bed beside the boy, wrapping his arms around him and pulling him close. Estel shifted to face Legolas, and immediately his breathing became more regular and even.

The next morning, Estel wriggled slightly, confused as to where he was and what was holding him, until he opened his eyes. Legolas gazed at the boy tiredly, having been awoken by his squirming. Immediately a bright smile crossed Estel's face. "Leg'lass? You're back? Can you play with me now?" Then he paused, his face falling slightly. "You're not angry anymore?"

Legolas smiled at him. "No Estel, I am not angry with you, and I am very sorry I scared you. And yes, today I am going to spend my whole day playing with you."

Legolas could not escape the monstrous hug that followed.

10. Earth

Aragorn slipped.

Down the hill, through the mud, in the rain, Aragorn slid, becoming entirely covered in the murky substance.

Aragorn's head fell back into the mud as he caught his breath. After a moment of shocked silence and mentally checking for injuriesâ€”he seemed to be intactâ€”a wide grin spread across his face. He began to laugh loudly into the rain as he continued to lie in the mud, feeling more splendid than he had in days.

Still chuckling, he eventually sat up, squishing the mud between his fingers.

How long has it been since he'd done something stupid like this? Leading the Rangers of the North was the perfect appointment for Aragorn, the best position to fit his personal needs, his life and lifestyle. Surely he could be himself there, and trust his men completely, almost as if they were family. But he was still a leader. He attempted not to make a complete fool of himself.

And at home, he had his brothers to deal with. His wonderful brothers, who would do anything in their power to see their human

brother in a less-than-wonderful situation. He always tried to keep on his toes when there was any possibility of their presence. Often he failed in this endeavor.

But Elladan and Elrohir were far away now, and he was not with the Rangers. He was free to be Estel. Messy, carefree, blissfully unhindered Estel.

With a sigh, he fell back into the mud, smiling as it covered him more completely.

After what seemed like a lifetime, Aragorn finally stood, his hair caked with mud, his clothes permanently stained (again), his skin coated with a thin layer of the substance, and his eyes sparkling with mirth as they hadn't in years. The rain had stopped, and as Aragorn completed his journey, the mud dried into dirt, sticking to everything in a way that would have horrified his serene and stately Elven father.

Legolas was the prissiest elf Aragorn had ever met. Unsurprisingly, the look of horror on his face when he saw the Ranger was priceless.

"Aragorn, son of Arathorn, do not step anywhere near this palace!"

Aragorn suppressed a grin. "Oh Legolas, then how do you expect me to wash?"

The prince's mouth became a line as he re-entered the palace. The gate swung shut in the man's face.

Aragorn was not going to like this.

****THERE WILL BE A SEQUEL TO THIS!****

End
file.